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ABSTRACT

In summer 2000, an extended-time project was initiated at Saint Louis Community College at Forest Park (SLCC-FP) to conduct a retrospective analysis of a sample of 482 entering students enrolled in entry-level writing courses at SLCC-FP during fall 1999. The purpose of the study was to examine the correspondence among students' academic success, ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test scores and recommended placement levels, and demographic data (age, gender, and race). Data collection items included students' ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills raw scores, recommended placement levels, demographic information, and students' end-of-semester grades in the entry-level writing courses. Selected findings include the following: 82% of the 482 tested students were appropriately placed; 64% of the tested enrollees in English 101, 030, and 020 passed with a grade of C or better; 62% of the tested students were females and 28% were males; 82% of the tested students comprise 17-25 age range; and 50% of the black students and 66% of the white students passed the entry-level writing courses. Although black students were in the majority, their passing rate was the lowest of all racial groups. Thus the study's findings provide analyses of the entry-level assessment practices and how those practices generally influence students' academic success in the entry-level writing courses (English 101, 030, and 020). Although the study's findings are not conclusive, the results do indicate that there is a significant correspondence between students' ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test scores, students academic success in the entry-level writing courses, and students' race, but students' age and gender seem not to be significant predictors of students' academic success in the entry-level writing courses. Contains 11 notes, 17 references, and 10 tables and a figure of data. (Author/RS)

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ED 447 505

ABSTRACT
MEETING THE NEEDS OF ENTERING STUDENTS THROUGH APPROPRIATE PLACEMENT IN ENTRY-LEVEL WRITING COURSES

BY

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Summer 2000

In Summer 2000, an extended-time project was initiated at SLCC-FP to conduct a retrospective analysis of a sample of 482 entering students enrolled in entry-level writing courses at SLCC-FP during Fall 1999. The purpose of the study was to examine the correspondence among students' academic success, ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test scores and recommended placement levels, and demographic data (age, gender, and race). Data collection items included students' ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills raw scores, recommended placement levels, demographic information, and students' end-of-semester grades in the entry-level writing courses. Selected findings included the following:

- 82% of the 482 tested students were appropriately placed.
- 64% of the tested enrollees in English 101, 030, and 020 passed with a grade of C or better.
- 62% of the tested students were females, and 28% were males.
- 82% of the tested students comprise 17-25 age range.
- 50% of the black students and 66% of the white students passed the entry-level writing courses. Although black students were in the majority, their passing rate was the lowest of all racial groups.

Thus, the study's findings provide analyses of our entry-level assessment practices and how those practices generally influence students' academic success in the entry-level writing courses (English 101,030, and 020). Although the study's findings are not conclusive, the results do indicate that there is a significant correspondence between students' ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test scores, students academic success in the entry-level writing courses,and students' race, but students' age and gender seem not be significant predictors of students' academic success in the entry-level writing courses. Extensive Notes and a selected Bibliography are also attached.

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BODY OF FINAL REPORT

MEETING THE NEEDS OF ENTERING STUDENTS THROUGH APPROPRIATE PLACEMENT IN ENTRY-LEVEL WRITING COURSES

PROBLEM OR NEED

When we examine our current mission statement, we are reminded of our commitment to providing "comprehensive postsecondary programs and services that are academically, geographically, and financially accessible" (SLCC, *2000-2001 Catalog, 5)* to a very diverse student population. As an "open-door" educational institution, we, like most community colleges, basically serve four distinct groups:

- the highly motivated, well-prepared
- the high expectations, unprepared
- the unmotivated, low self-esteem
- the unprepared, low expectation (Nielson 45).

How, then, do we try to serve the needs of these diverse entering and continuing students, so that they will experience academic success? Because of the diverse student population we serve, the need for effective entry-level assessment is crucial; besides, many research studies suggest that placement testing may be a useful predictor of students' academic success (Armstrong 1-15; Hughes & Nelson 42-46; Smittle 37-45; Maxwell 60-78). Thus, the need arose to evaluate our entry-level writing assessment practices in order to ensure the appropriate placement of all students in our entry-level writing courses: English 101, 030, and 020. [1]

Endemic to our efforts of matriculation and retention is the issue of entry-level assessment, for as Roueche and Archer claim, "Unless we can determine the readiness of students who enter our community colleges, . . . we cannot continue to claim to be 'open door' institutions"(26). Besides, we have an "obligation to utilize reliable and valid tools for offering placement advice to [our] students, and assessment used for this purpose must be examined to ensure that they are effective and not harmful"(Gillespie 59). Consequently, the need exists to examine the accuracy of our entry-level English assessment practices in order to obtain pertinent information that may help to increase the academic success of our highly diverse student population.

By identifying specific factors which contribute to students' academic success as well as those which may put them at the risk of non-success, institutional research can contribute substantially to the college's missing of making "open access" the "right to succeed" for every student who attends (Boese et al.4) That is, if we use placement tests, we need to "perform local validity studies . . . to ensure that the test being used is

appropriate for the courses into which students are being placed and to ensure that their cutoff scores are at the optimal level for placement accuracy" (Gillespie 67).

Thus, in summer 2000, a retrospective analysis, of 482 students who had taken ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test between January and August 1999 of their enrollment year, was performed. The primary aims of this study were to determine the relationship between students' test scores and grades received in entry-level writing courses, and to examine the correlation between that test's placement decision and students' demographics of age, gender, and race. The basic question this study investigated was: **Is there a significant relationship among the students' English placement score, academic performance in the entry-level writing course, and demographic data of age, race, and gender?**

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

For English placement, all entering students are required to take ACCUPLACER,[2] a "software system designed to provide placement, advisement, and guidance information for students entering institutions of higher education. ACCUPLACER is designed to increase both the efficacy and ease of initial class placement . . .. "(Cole 174). However, if our students provide appropriate documentation of proficiency in certain basic skills, including English, then, the "Admissions Office may waive all or part of the entry assessment"(SLCC, *Fall 2000 Schedule 7).* At SLCC-FP, English placement decisions are "usually" based on students' scores in relation to preset cutoff scores. Table 1 displays the cutoff scores utilized for placement in specified entry-level writing courses.

Table 1: SLCC-FP ENTRY-LEVEL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM, RECOMMENDED ACCUPLACER SCORES FOR ENGLISH PLACEMENT

RAW SCORES	COURSE PLACEMENT
35 or below	NAP
36-59	English 020
60-82	English 030
83-111	English 101
112 or above	English 104

Thus, it is necessary to examine how well ACCUPLACER's English placement decisions influence students' academic success in these entry-level writing courses: English 101, 030, and 020. That is, this study addressed these objectives:

1. To determine the number and percentage of students who successfully completed, during the Fall 1999 semester, the entry-level writing courses with a grade of "C" or better

2. To determine the number and percentage of students, who were unsuccessful in the entry-level writing courses, with grades less than a "C," including notations of "D," "F," "I," "PR," and "W"
3. To determine the relationship between students' ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test scores and grades received in the entry-level writing courses
4. To examine if there is any correspondence between students' ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test scores and the demographics of age, race, and gender
5. To suggest appropriate recommendations and further research regarding the accuracy of ACCUPLACER's placement decisions, instructional and support services that may significantly influence students' academic success in the entry-level writing courses, and relevant follow-up studies that continually re-examine our English entry-level assessment practices.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Objective #1: Success Rates

Figure 1 displays the data regarding the number and percentage of students who enrolled in pre-college writing courses, English 030 and 020, and the college-level writing courses, English 101.

Figure 1 represents the success rates of students (n=482) in the study. Overall, approximately 64% of those enrolled in the pre-college-level writing courses, English 030 and 020, were successful. Of the students enrolled in the college-level writing courses, English 101, 58% were successful.

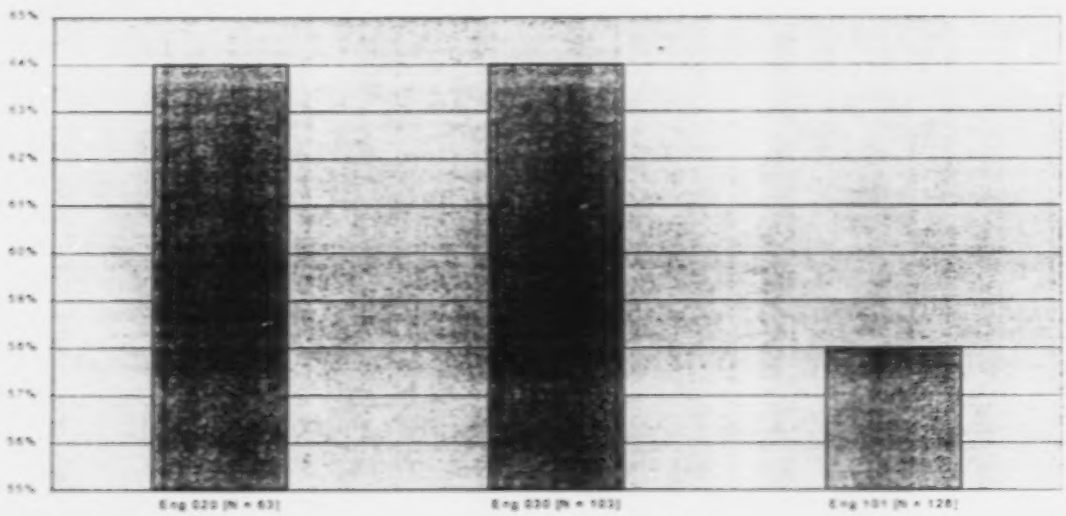

Figure 1: SUCCESS RATE [Earning "C" or Better]

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This result is a favorable indication, for it seems that placement advice is appropriate and that students value the courses well enough to complete them and to do fairly well. Besides, Roueche and Roueche define successful entry-level writing courses as those having 50% or higher retention rate (69-75). In all three entry-level writing courses, the retention rate exceeded 50%.

However, this analysis precluded the variations in instructor's grading standards, which could have significantly influenced the grades the students received in those courses. If this assumption is accurate, then a grading consistency activity needs to be instituted within the English Department to ensure reasonable agreement in our grading standards and practices. One way to determine this uniformity is to require exit competency assessment for all entry-level writing courses. Therefore, the current course-of-study outlines, for English 101, 030, and 020, should be thoroughly revamped to reflect current assessment theories and practices, and to reflect uniformity in entrance and exit competencies. To ensure compliance to those requirements, faculty who teach the entry-level writing courses should be thoroughly trained in holistic, analytic, and primary-trait scoring, along with training in the writing of valid and reliable prompts.[4]

Objectives 2 and 3: Grade Distributions/Failure Rates and Relationship between Test Scores and Grades

Tables 2, 3, and 4 illustrate data on the number and percentage of students who

- enrolled in English 101, 030, and 020
- were appropriately placed in and, subsequently, enrolled in English 101, 030, and 020
- were inaccurately enrolled in English 101, 030, and 020.

Table 2: Grade Distribution for English 101 (Fall 1999)

Criteria	Grades Earned							
	A	B	C	D	F	PR	W	I
Mixed scores 0-118 Students enrolled: n=221	N=43 19%	N=51 23%	N=35 16%	N=3 2%	n=27 12%	n=27 12%	n=30 14%	n=5 2%
Appropriate placement score:83-111 N=168	n=37 22%	n=38 21%	n=28 17%	n=3 2%	n=16 10%	n=17 11%	n=24 14%	n=5 3%
Mixed scores: 0-118 Inaccurate enrollment n=53	n=6 11%	n=13 25%	n=7 13%	n=0 0%	n=11 21%	n=10 19%	n=6 11%	n=0 0%

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Table 3: Grade Distribution for English 030 (Fall 1999)

Criteria	Grades Earned							
	A	B	C	D	F	PR	W	I
Mixed scores 42-108 Students enrolled n=162	n=29 18%	n=43 27%	n=28 17%	n=5 3%	n=15 9%	n=17 11%	n=25 15%	n=0 0%
Appropriate placement score 60-82 n=144	n=26 18%	n=37 26%	n=27 19%	n=4 3%	n=15 10%	n=14 10%	n=21 14%	n=0 0%
Mixed scores: 42-108 Inaccurate enrollment: n=18	n=3 17%	n=6 34%	n=1 5%	n=1 5%	n=0 0%	n=3 17%	n=4 22%	n=0 0%

Table 4: Grade Distribution for English 020 (Fall 1999)

Criteria	Grades Earned							
	A	B	C	D	F	PR	W	I
Mixed scores: 28-101 Students enrolled:n-99	n=12 12%	n=25 26%	n=24 24%	n=3 3%	n=13 13% 1	n=4 4%	n=15 15%	n=3 3%
Appropriate placement:n=82 Appropriate score36-59	n=9 11%	n=22 27%	n=20 24%	n=3 4%	n=11 13%	n=3 4%	n=11 13%	n=3 4%
Inappropriate enrollment:n=17 Mixed scores: 28-101	n=3 18%	n=3 18%	n=4 23%	n=0 0%	n=2 12%	n=1 6%	n=4 23%	n=0 0%

The data in Tables 2, 3, and 4 illustrate that the pre-college and college-level writing courses establish grades "A" through "I." In both cases, "PR" represents "Progress Re-enroll" status; "W" represents a "Withdrawal" from the course, either by the student or faculty recommendation for non-attendance during the first two weeks of the semester; and "I" represents an incomplete status. The results suggest that students, for the most part, are successfully completing the developmental courses, English 030 and 020, into which they were placed, based on their ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test scores. The successful completion rate, 62-63%, is adequate. That is, composition researchers suggest that

> one measure of success of [entry-level writing courses] is the extent to which [they prepare] students for success in regular college courses. If the [entry-level writing courses] are effective, students who pass [those courses] should also pass regular curriculum courses in the same or related disciplines. (Boylan and Bonham 127)

Also, although the grades of students who take the pre-college writing courses may lag "somewhat behind the grades of other students"(128), an effective placement program, followed by a careful instructional program, will allow students who have not succeeded in their writing courses to continue successfully in the pursuit of their academic goals. This observation is crucial because one of the reasons for instituting the placement and pre-college writing courses is to increase retention.

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Likewise, the success rate (60%) of those students who were recommended to take English 101, based on their ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test scores, was satisfactory. Comparatively speaking, the overall success rate of students enrolled in English 101 was 58%. The inappropriately placed students' success rate was 49%(4=53). Thus, this comparison suggests that students whose placement decisions are based on the designated test scores, generally, succeed (60%) in English 101 with a grade of C or better.

As shown in Tables 2, 3, and 4, an average of 62% of students receive passing grades in English 101, 030, and 020. In contrast, an average of 55% of students enrolled in an entry-level writing course, with inappropriate test scores, received passing grades. These data suggest that errors in placement occur in the departments of counseling and advising because our entering students are not allowed to engage in self-advisement. If all counselors and advisors request proof of students' assessment scores, and if they use those scores to place students in the appropriate entry-level writing courses, then the students who failed (an average of 45%) may have passed the recommended entry-level writing courses with at least a grade of C. Thus, the results suggest that scores on the ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test are strong indicators of students' academic success in English 101, 030, and 020. One of the major problems I encountered involved these grades: "W," "PR," and "I." Should these grades be treated as course failures, or should they be dropped from the analysis? But I realized that the accuracy of reporting whether or not students earned passing grades (A through C) was substantially greater than when those grades were excluded This conclusion may be inferred because students may withdraw from a course for a variety of reasons, some of which may have no direct connection with their academic ability to complete the coursework. Thus, for this study, the decision was made to retain the grades of "W," "PR," and "I."

Objective #4a: Demographic Characteristics

Tables 5, 6, and 7 show the distribution of students who took the ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test by demographic characteristics: gender, race, and age. [Reminder: The number of these students who were misplaced include: 53 in English 101, 18 in English 030, and 17 in English 020, making a total of 88 (or 18% of the total sample: N=482) misplacements.

Table 5: Demographic Characteristics for English 101 (Fall 1999)

Demographics	Number	Percentage
Gender		
• Male	105	48
• Female	116	52
Total:Gender	221	100
Race		
• Black	121	54
• White	79	36
• Hispanic	3	2
• Other	18	8
Total: Race	221	100
Age		
• 17-25	183	83
• 26-40	36	16
• over 40	2	1
Total :Age	221	100

Table 6: Demographic Characteristics for English 030 (Fall 1999)

Demographics	Number	Percentage
Gender		
• Male	53	33
• Female	109	67
Total: Gender	162	100
Race		
• Black	108	67
• White	39	24
• Hispanic	1	1
• Other	14	8
Total: Race	162	100
Age		
• 17-25	134	83
• 26-40	27	16
• over 40	1	1
Total: Age	162	100

Table 7: Demographic Characteristics for English 020 (Fall 1999)

Demographics	Number	Percentage
Gender		
• Male	35	33
• Female	64	67
Total :Gender	99	100
Race		
• Black	83	84
• White	8	8
• Hispanic	2	2
• Other	6	6
Total:Race	99	100
Age		
• 17-25	79	80
• 26-40	14	14
• over 40	6	6
Total: Age	99	100

On close examination of Tables 5, 6, and 7, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- Gender Category:

Females comprise the larger group with 52% of the tested population for English 101, 67% for English 030, and 67% for English 020. In contrast, the males make up the smaller group with 48% of the tested population for English 101, 33% for English 030, and 33% for English 020.

- Racial Category:

Black students are the largest group, comprising 54% of the tested population for English 101, 67% for English 030, and 84% for English 020. White students are the next largest group, comprising 36% of the tested population for English 101, 24% for English 030, and 8% for English 202. The "Other" racial group includes the following: "Non-Specified," "Non-Citizens," No Response," American Indian/Alaskans, and Asian students. The students who did not indicate their racial identity on the ACCUPLACER test form were placed in the "No Response" or "Non-Specified" categories. That is, the "Other" category comprises 8% of the tested population for English 101, 6% for English 020, and 8% for English 030. Only 2% of the "Other" tested population enrolled in English 101, 1% in English 030, and 2% in English 020.

- Age Range Category:

Students in the age range 17-25 comprise the largest group: 83% of the tested population enrolled in English 030, 80% in English 030, and 83% in English 101. On the other hand, in the 26-40 age, 16% of the tested population enrolled in English 101, 14% in English 020, and 16% in English 030. However, students over 40 years of age comprise the smallest group of tested enrollees: 1% in English 101, 6% in English 020, and 1% in English 030.

Objective #4b: Success Rate/Frequency Distributions by Race, Gender, and Age

Tables 8, 9, and 10 illustrate the frequency distribution by race, gender, and age of students who successfully completed English 101, 030, and 020 with a "C" or better. [Reminder: Of the total number of students (n=482) who were tested, these percentages reflect the misplacements (n=88): English 101, 11%; English 030, 4%; English 020, 4%].

Table 8: Success Rates/Frequency Distribution by Race (Fall 1999)

Racial group	English 101 N=221	English 030 N=162	English 020 N=99
Black	T=121 P=61 PP=50	T=108 P=66 PP=61	T=83 P=51 PP=61
White	T=79 P=52 PP=66	T=39 P=27 PP=69	T=8 P=7 PP=88
Hispanic	T=3 P=2 PP=66%	T=1 P=1 PP=100	T=6 P=3 PP=50%
Other	T=18 P=13 PP=72	T=14 P=9 PP=64	T=6 P=3 PP=50
Total	P=128 PP=58	P=103 PP=64	P=63 PP=64

Legend:

T = Number tested
P = number passed
PP= Percentage passed

Table 9: Success Rate: Frequency Distribution by Age (Fall 1999)

Age Groups	Eng.101: N=221	Eng.030: N=162	Eng. 020: N=99
17-25	T=183 P=107 PP=58	T=134 P=86 PP=64	T=79 P=50 PP=63
26-40	T=36 P=20 PP=55	T=27 P=17 PP=63	T=14 P=9 PP=64
Over 40	T=2 P=1 PP=50	T=1 P=0 PP=0	T=6 P=4 PP=67
Total	P=128 PP=58	P=103 PP=64	P=63 PP=64

Legend:
T=Number tested
P= Number passed
PP= Percentage passed

Table 10: Success Rate: Frequency Distribution by Gender

Gender	Eng.10l; N=221	Eng.030: N=162	Eng.020: N=99
Male	T=105 P=60 PP=57	T=53 P=40 PP=75	T=35 P=17 PP=49
Female	T=116 P=68 PP=59	T=109 P=63 PP=58	T=64 P=46 PP=72
Total	P=128 PP=58	P=103 PP=64	P=63 PP=64

Legend:
T= Number tested
P=Number passed
PP= Percentage passed

Tables 7, 8, and 9 display the following results:

- **Age:**

Age does not appear to be a significant determiner of students' academic success in the entry-level writing courses English 101, 030, and 020. That is,

- in the 17-25 age group, 58% passed English 101; 64% passed English 030; and, 63% passed English 020;
- in the 25-40 age group, 56% passed English 101; 63% passed English 030; and, 64% passed English 020;

- in the over 40 age group, 50% passed English 101; no one passed English 030; and, 67% passed English 020.

- **Gender:**

Gender does seem to be an important predictor of students' academic success in the entry-level writing courses: English 101, 030, and 020. That is,

- of the 105 males who were tested, 56% passed English 101; 75% passed English 030; and, 49% passed English 020;
- of the 116 females who were tested, 59% passed English 101; 58% passed English 030; 72% passed English 020.

- **Race:**

Race appears to be a significant predictor of students' academic success in the entry-level writing courses because of the variation among the racial groups. Although the majority of students who were tested (65%) and were enrolled in the entry-level courses are black students, black students, on the average, performed significantly lower than other racial groups. That is,

- Of the 162 students who were enrolled in English 030, 108 were black students; 39 were white students; 1 was Hispanic; and 14 were classified as "Other."

- The passing rate of black students was 61%; of white students, 69%; of Hispanics, 100%; of "Other," 64%;
- Of the 99 students who were tested and enrolled in English 020, 83 were black students; 8 were white students; 2 were Hispanics; and, 6 were classified as "Other." The passing rate of black students was 61%; of white students, 88%; of Hispanics, 100%; and, of "Other," 50%.

Because the college uses several criteria for placing students in the entry-level writing courses, we can speculate that the black students, who were tested, did not have the necessary documentation, such as appropriate ACT/SAT scores, degrees, etc. Therefore, of the 221 students who were enrolled in English 101, 121 were black students; 79 were white students; 3 were Hispanics; and, 18 were classified as "Other." The passing rate of Black students was 50%; of white students, 66%; of Hispanics, 66%; of "Others," 72%. Although the black students were in the majority; their passing percentage (50%) was the lowest of all racial groups.

But assessment is usually problematic for those students for whom Standard English is either a second dialect or a second language. For some African-American students, Standard English is a second dialect; that is, they have to shift from conversational dialect to the language required for academic writing. In the case of the ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test, a decontextualized[5] standardized multiple-choice test, these second dialect students have to change dialect codes during the editing process [Note: The ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test does not evaluate students' ability to compose and revise; on the contrary, it assesses their ability to edit sentences], which compounds the stress of a testing situation and a dialect code change (Wolcott and Legg 160-161). Therefore, issues of equity must be recognized and carefully considered.

Objectiv#5: Implications and Recommendations

St. Louis Community College at Forest Park's placement efforts are as successful as other similar community college programs although there is room for improvement. Over 50% of the students, who were tested and enrolled in the entry-level writing courses during Fall 1999, satisfactorily completed those courses by earning a grade of "C" or better. Because our matriculation goals are designed to ensure that all students successfully complete their courses, persist to the next semester, and achieve their educational objectives, entry-level assessment becomes a major component of that process.

Based on the study's findings, entering students should be considered an "at-risk" group regardless of their ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test scores. Motivation, discipline, study skills, as well as basic skills preparation can significantly influence students' academic survival and success in college. St. Louis Community at Forest Park can further enhance students' academic success in the entry-level writing courses if these suggestions are taken seriously:

1. SLCC-FP English Department needs to identify and implement more effective instructional strategies that will facilitate student learning and, where necessary, systematically review the Writing Curriculum. This may be achieved through the development of alternative pedagogical approaches, such as collaborative modular learning and instructional technology (e.g., **INVEST** and **SYNERGY**[6]).
2. Working collaboratively with the Assessment Center, the SLCC-FP English Department needs to develop a database with adequate entry-level writing sample sizes to permit ongoing evaluation of the relationship between demographics, ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test scores and recommended placement levels, and course-specific success measures (e.g., grades and successful completion). This requires working back from course enrollment lists to admissions and assessment records and forward to transcripts for end-of-semester grades. The sampling design may include students who enroll in the selected courses no more than two semesters after they enter college and are assessed for basic skills proficiency. Perhaps, the Assessment Center should utilize ACCUPLACER Computerized Placement System (CPMS) that evaluates information about students and recommend their placement into courses best suited for them. It also tracks their progress and maintains their records. Also, SLCC-FP should request from the College Board results of their Differential Item Function analysis of ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test.[7]
3. Effectiveness of the sequencing of entry-level writing courses depends on clear entrance and exit competencies uniformly accepted by the English Department. Effectiveness of sequencing also depends on prerequisites, correct placement, and supervised or monitored tracking through the sequencing for individual students. Therefore, the English Department needs to
    - Establish uniform exit competencies to be met for a minimum grade of "C" in English 101, 030, and 020. These exit standards should be annually reviewed to ensure validity and reliability.
    - Consider exit testing with essay prompts for all students enrolled in English 101, 030, and 020.

- Monitor placement to ensure that students are correctly placed in the entry-level writing courses.
- Encourage and promote consistency in grading within the English Department, perhaps, by developing a uniform academic writing skills index for English 101, 030, and 020.
- Do test cut-score study[8]; include a survey of the English faculty who teach the entry-level writing courses regarding their assessment of ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills placement decisions.

4. During the first week of each semester, preferably on the first day of class, instructors should be strongly encouraged to assign, collect, and assess impromptu writing from students in English 101, 030, and 020. Students who seem to be misplaced, according to the in-class diagnostic activity, can then be counseled immediately into appropriate courses. If training in holistic scoring is provided to all who teach entry-level writing courses, then this preparation could assist English teachers in speedily assessing students' diagnostic essays[9]. Additionally, for the students who took ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test, the English Department should be provided with a printout of the students' test scores. This printout could be online at a department's computer terminal or on each instructor's course/class roster.
5. The English Department needs a basic educational master plan that addresses collaboration with various constituencies. Using this master plan, it could engage in the following:
    - Offer several non-credit academic skills courses through Continuing Education and other basic adult programs available in the community, primarily for those students whose ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills test scores fell below 35.
    - Expand the use of word-processing in all entry-level writing courses. Perhaps, a network of personal computers would be beneficial. That is, a PC network, such as IBM Academic Desklab[10] could provide the most efficient means for administering the drill-and-practice needed, especially by remedial students. Also, it could allow students to work at their own pace in a non-judgmental setting. And, most importantly, the system would provide the student assessment, tracking, and monitoring required by our mission statement that promotes students' academic success.
    - Develop closer linkages with all area high schools, whilecontinuing the special programs, exclusively designed for high school students.
    - Expand and improve the tutoring program in writing to include specially trained tutors, both students and professionals, in the Learning Achievement Center and the Writing Center.
    - Provide staff development seminars that assist all English faculty members in working with a non-traditional, diverse student population who may be highly motivated and well prepared, who may have high expectations but are academically unprepared, who are unmotivated and have low self-esteem, and who are academically unprepared and have low self-esteem (Nielsen 45).
    - Develop practical, continuous student intervention activities with Advising and Counseling Departments.

6. Finally, the study's findings suggest the need for released time for a committee of two or three faculty members who are well-grounded in a broad understanding of assessment theories, practices, and research, specifically as they relate to contextualized and decontextualized assessment. This committee's duties would be quite comprehensive because they would entail an in-depth review and understanding of this study's findings, including related literature; and the expertise in knowing how to address the study's findings, while keeping in mind the complexities of writing assessment, whether placement or classroom, as a microcosm of the assessment discipline in general. Most specifically, this committee would try to determine whether the SLCC-FP entry-level writing courses' subject matter, academic standards, and methods of instruction are consistent with departmentally approved course objectives. Thus, this committee" initiatives would situate writing assessment, placement and classroom, within the framework of general assessment practices, providing practical ways of improving our current assessment practices which will help in ensuring students' academic success in entry-level and subsequent courses that require writing. Thus, the committee may want to do the following:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the sequencing of entry-level writing courses, specifically noting their entrance and exit competency requirements
- Evaluate the Sentence Skills section of ACCUPLACER test, especially doing a Differential Item Function Analysis (DIF)
- Evaluate the English Department's suggested entry-level course of study outlines, paying special attention to assignment expectations, grading standards, and assessment procedures, attendance policies, as well as grading, tracking and placement procedures
- Survey a random sample of transfer students to senior colleges, universities, and the workplace, soliciting information about their writing preparation at SLCC-FP
- Assess the effectiveness of the entry-level writing courses by focusing on the varying instructional methods, including instructional technology.

BENEFITS OF STUDY

The primary stakeholders of our college, including students, faculty, support staff, and administrators, will significantly benefit from this study" findings if the results are taken seriously. That is, in an effort to meet the needs of our diverse student population and to ensure their academic success, we need to do the following:

1. Fulfill NCA's recommendations that require us to engage in continuous improvement of our assessment practices, include entry-level testing.
2. Achieve our campus' primary objective: to improve the academic success of all students through appropriate entry-level course placements. Most specifically, this study's results and recommendations could enhance our understanding of the flow of those students who were tested from their reception of their ACCUPLACER Sentence Skills raw scores, to advising/counseling where they are placed in the appropriate[11] entry-level writing courses, to their enrollment in the entry-level writing courses, and, finally, to their academic status in the entry-level writing courses at the end of the semester.

3. Provide relevant information on the effectiveness of our administrative and instructional assessment practices. This study's results and recommendations have identified contributing factors of students' academic success as well as those which may put them at the risk of failure. Thus, although the study's findings suggest that, our overall accuracy of placement is acceptable, we still need to engage in continuous re-evaluation of our assessment practices to ensure the achievement of our college's mission of making "open access" the "right to succeed" for all our students.

NOTES

1. English 104 was excluded from the study because of unavailable data. Although a few students (n=9) had an appropriate score for placement in English 104, they were placed in English 101.

2. ACCUPLACER, a Windows-based placement program for incoming college freshmen, measures skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. It is a computer-adaptive test (CAT). This means that the computer automatically determines which questions are presented to the test-takers based on their responses to prior questions. This technique zeroes in on just the right questions to ask without being too easy or difficult.

3. The appropriate documentation includes: college transcript, a degree from an accredited institution, a composite ACT score of 21, and SAT I verbal score of 500 or above.

4. The commonly used scoring guides include:
   - **Holistic** scoring which focuses on an entire piece of writing rather than its individual parts. Thus, an essay is evaluated in terms of specific features, (e.g., its *development, organization, coherence, etc.).* Ratings are not derived by adding together scores of these features. Instead, a paper is scored in terms of the overall impression of **one** feature's impact (e.g., **development)** on the whole essay.
   - **Analytic** scoring breaks writing into specific elements (e.g., *thesis, development, organization, style, etc.)* so that students can receive comprehensive feedback on their writing strengths and weaknesses. In an analytic scoring of an essay, for instance, not only would the thesis, development, and organization, to name a few, come under scrutiny, but also the style, etc., used to discuss the topic would be evaluated.
   - **Primary trait** scoring defines precisely what segment of the essay will be evaluated (e.g., *development).* That is, in primary trait scoring, a writer's essay is measured against a specific criterion (e.g., *development);* no other writing skills are evaluated, although secondary and tertiary skills may be separately examined.

5. **Contextualized** assessment is tied to the curriculum. That is, it measures products, essays written during the semester that correlate with the syllabus' objectives, rather than assessing one single event, such as a placement or a diagnostic activity. In contrast, **decontextualized** assessment judges students' performance on a single event which is not related to the students' curriculum objectives that attempt to assess their ability to compose and revise.

6. **INVEST** and **SYNERGY** are computerized, interactive, instructional systems that facilitate basic skills development through a Windows-driven access module for the students and command modules for the teachers.

7. **DIFFERENTIAL ITEM FUNCTION** is "the index used to help determine whether a question is accurately reflecting real differences between groups of test-takers or whether the question itself somehow produces unfair differences; that is, differences are not related to the construct [actual ability] being tested"(Carlton 2).

8. **CUT-SCORE** study determines the raw score that examinees should have in order to demonstrate their level of performance. That cut-score may be normed or criterion-referenced.

9. Holistic scoring is recommended because it "enables large numbers of papers to be scored at a reasonable expenditure of time, . . . but also, and more significantly, because it requires scorers to weigh each essay as a whole" (Wolcott and Legg 182-83).

10. IBM Academic Desklab System, an easy-to-install classroom network, is designed specifically for college-level developmental education. It comes pre-configured with software that lets faculty begin assessment and remediation immediately and features an open architecture that allows them to add additional courseware to customize their curricula. Each Desklab consists of an IBM Personal System server, a minimum of seven PS/2 workstations, two IBM laser printers, and necessary LAN hardware and software.

11. The study's results show that approximately 18% (n=88) of the total number of students tested (n=482) were inappropriately placed into entry-level writing courses by advisors and counselors during the Fall 1999 semester.

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